

IF CIGARETTES CONTAIN ATROPINE

Smoking Found Beneficial In Treating Cases of Asthma

By David M. Cleary
Science Writer

Smoking isn't always bad for you, despite the charges that it may be a cause of lung cancer. In West Berlin, smoking has been used with beneficial results in the treatment of asthma.

But Dr. H. Herxheimer of the Free University of Berlin makes it clear that it wasn't ordinary cigarettes that he gave to asthmatic patients. They were a kind in which the tobacco had a low nicotine content, and he added a solution of atropine to each cigarette before it was smoked.

"There is no doubt that the inhalation of atropine smoke has a beneficial effect on lung function in bronchial obstruction," reported Dr. Herxheimer in the British Medical Journal.

ATROPINE ACTS to increase the vital capacity (the amount the lungs can breathe) and gives a feeling of relief in mild to moderate cases of chronic asthma, according to the doctor.

He notes that atropine isn't much good if given by injection or by mouth, but his experiments in inhaling it through cigarettes cause the doctor to say quite a few years ago, and limit the low esteem in which current textbooks hold atropine in the treatment of asthma is not justified.

The extent to which breathing ability increased after smoking pine-and-tobacco cigarettes are the drug-treated cigarettes varied, about the same as with jimson

weed. Dr. Herxheimer admits. In 62 per cent of the patients who tried the cigarettes, the increase was greater than 10 per cent — which often is the difference between pain and comfort. But atropine isn't as toxic as jimson weed can be, and he feels that the atropine cigarettes have the advantage of allowing dosage to be adequately controlled within safe limits.

THE IMPROVEMENT usually came within three to five minutes after smoking, but it was a somewhat longer time, from 15 to 30 minutes, before the improvement reached its maximum, wrote Dr. Herxheimer.

Duration of the improvement was also variable. All the patients who had greater ability to breathe maintained their sense of well-being an hour and a half after smoking. But then the effect began to wear off; it had been completely dissipated in all patients at the end of three hours.

Dr. Herxheimer's approach to asthma relief through smoking isn't new. Common jimson weed produces both narcotic and relaxing effects when the leaves are smoked, and can be a potent poison in large doses.

The smoke of burning jimson weed leaves was prescribed for asthmatics in the United States. The smoke of burning jimson weed cigarettes still are produced commercially as "asthma cigarettes."

RESULTS with the special atropine-and-tobacco cigarettes are the drug-treated cigarettes varied, about the same as with jimson

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Problems with the atropine cigarettes were rare. Only two of the 39 patients who tried them developed a cough, which causes the vital capacity to fall, according to the doctor.

It is not likely that smoking will become routine treatment for asthma, however. Other drugs

RECORD

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Lung Cancer Cause

A MAN who has devoted his scientific career to a study of the causes of cancer warns that air pollution is a more important factor than cigarette smoking in the increase of lung cancer.

He is Dr. Wilhelm C. Hueper, chief of the environmental section of the National Cancer Institute at Bethesda, Md., and he makes the significant observation that the upsurge in lung cancer first was noted between 1900 and 1920, several years before the practice of cigarette smoking became widespread.

Boston, having one of the most serious air pollution problems in the entire United States, cannot fail to be impressed—and disturbed—by Dr. Hueper's findings.

We have always suspected that there was a connection between our contaminated air and the fact that tuberculosis is more prevalent in Boston than in any comparable city, and the Bethesda studies support that suspicion.

The next session of the Legislature would do well to pass laws against the needless poisoning of the atmosphere by industrial smoke stacks.

Other places, notably Pittsburgh, have proved the wisdom of screening out the fumes and ashes which currently rain down upon Boston and other cities, damaging human respiratory systems and undoubtedly shortening thousands of lives.

Enlightened Massachusetts ought to be able to accomplish at least as much in the public interest.

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